

Our Canals.

The canal season has closed; the statement of tonnage received at and cleared from this port has been published, and therefore, an glance at the past history and oral review of the probable future of the canals may not be inappropriate.

In the maintenance of these great arteries, which connect the rich valleys of Ohio and Indiana with the great lakes, Toledo is deeply interested. When these channels were first opened, and for many succeeding years, they formed the only available outlet for the vast production of a region whose richness and fertility are unsurpassed. Then they were regarded with universal favor. No one thought their destruction, and none ever dreamed of the possibility of their abandonment.

But a change came over the public mind. New and rival enterprises were started, and soon the country was awakened by the snort of the "iron horse." The people, through various influences not necessary here to discuss, were almost convinced that this new and mighty agent was the only one requisite to develop the resources of the country. The slower, yet certain and safe transportation by water was to be abandoned, and on the wings of steam alone everything was to be moved with such rapidity, certainty and economy, as to cast other methods of transportation entirely into the shade.

This new agency was under the control of individuals—active, enterprising men—whose object was, of course, pecuniary gain, while the canals remained for a long time under the control of the State to which they belonged. The agents of these States, to whom the direct management of the Public Works was entrusted, being the representatives of political parties, and therefore frequently changed, had too often less interest in the pecuniary results of their charge than in the success of their respective parties. Under such influences the contest was unequal. The enterprise of railroad management was too much for the indifferent State agents, and very naturally the interests of the canals suffered, greatly to the advantage of their competitors.

This state of affairs continued until at last the canals failed to be self-sustaining, and became a direct tax upon the State. Such a burden could not be expected long to be endured, at last the Legislature determined to permit, for a limited time, the Public Works to pass under individual control, and they were leased in the summer of 1850, to parties who agreed to pay an annual rent of twenty thousand dollars.

Here was a new starting point—the political shackles were struck off, and new motives were henceforth to control the management of these great and valuable works. Now was to commence, not only a trial of skill, but the actual capacity of capitalists to compete with railroads. The lessors were active, enterprising and experienced men. In the success of their enterprise, they involved direct and important pecuniary results. They were men of faith in the ability of the canals to maintain this competition—men of will, who resolved, when they put their hands to the plow, not to look back until the fruits of their undertaking should have been realized—men with whom to resolve was to do.

Upon the assumption of the charge of the Public Works by this organization, new life was infused into every department. Energy and activity took the place of the fatal lethargy which had stolen upon the old management. No effort has been spared, we are assured, to put and keep the canals in the best possible condition. Accidents and detentions have occurred, but these were soon remedied, and boats have not been detained an hour longer than was absolutely necessary. The people were not slow in perceiving that a new order of things had been brought about; and businessmen have become gradually reassured that the canals will certainly be maintained. The result is an increased traffic and an addition to the number of boats. The increased facilities thus afforded for transportation have continued to call back to shore once favorite channel matiné who had become estranged, until the canal business, as shown in the table alluded to, greatly exceeds that of any other year. The ability to compete successfully for a fair proportion of the tonnage to be transported, has been fully demonstrated, and they now occupy a position from which nothing but mismanagement can drive them.

But large as was the task of the past year, it would have been much larger but for the following causes: 1st, a stone flock unexpectedly gave way and the walls fell in, which caused a suspension of through navigation on the Miami and Erie Canal for many weeks; next the unprecedented drought which prevailed in many parts of the country for a long time, and at a period when the utmost activity of every means was demanded so reduced the water upon the summum level that boats drawing even two feet of water found it difficult to pass; the third cause was the inadequate number of boats to meet the greatly increased demands for shippers. The first of these impediments was removed at the earliest possible moment. Of the recurrence of the second there is believed to be no danger, as the completion of the Lewiston Reservoir—now regarded certain during the present winter—will furnish at all times a supply of water adequate to all the demands of navigation, even though a greater drought than that of 1862 shall be experienced. The third, it is believed, will be provided for by the construction of a considerable number of new boats during the winter; many of these will be steamers, and all be first-class, thus adding such additional assurance to shippers as to leave them no room to doubt that property entrusted to the canals will be safely and promptly transported to its destination. In addition to all this, a large number of boats which have fallen into decay, will be rebuilt before the opening of navigation in the spring, and all will be put in the best possible state of repair, so that, unless from extraordinary causes, no detention, it is believed, will be suffered by the boats during the season of 1863.

We are sure that the favorable showing thus made, based upon information derived from authentic sources, will be gratifying to all citizens of the State, in whom the ownership of the canals still rests, and by some of them more than those who, with us, doubted the policy of placing these works in the hands of individuals, lest they should not be kept up. The promise thus given of their efficient management is specially gratifying at a time like the present, when with their full capacity employed, and the railroads equally taxed, the immense traffic of the country through which they pass cannot be accommodated. There need be no anxiety, finally between the two systems of transportation; when both are overwhelmed with business. Each has its advantages, and both should be alike cherished and strengthened.—Blade.

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